

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SECRETARY OF STATE HOLDS PUBLIC HEARING ON ELECTION REFORM PLAN

Bismarck, ND – Secretary of State Al Jaeger's office is conducting a public hearing on Monday, July 21 to gather comments and input concerning the state's proposed plan for implementing federal election reform. The plan, released on June 25, outlines how the state will allocate approximately \$8 million dollars of the \$9 million in federal funds the state anticipates spending between now and January 1, 2006.

The hearing will be conducted in Bismarck and will also be broadcast live at satellite locations in Fargo, Grand Forks, and Minot via the Interactive Video Network (See attached schedule with times, locations, and addresses for hearing locations). While the proposed plan has not yet generated many responses or comments, Jaeger is hopeful that the hearing will offer interested parties an opportunity to learn about the state's election reform efforts and offer suggestions and improvements for the plan.

"I am looking forward to learning what others have to say about our efforts," said Jaeger. "The more diverse voices and interests that contribute to the planning process, the better the plan will be for all of North Dakota."

The proposed plan addresses requirements of the Help America Vote Act of 2002. Better known as HAVA, the far-reaching reform legislation includes a multitude of changes and requirements intended to improve voting systems and procedures and the way elections are conducted. The new law also provides federal money to states for the purposes of improving election administration, replacing punch card voting equipment, better educating election workers and voters, improving voter accessibility, and purchasing new and advanced voting equipment. According to Jaeger, the state has already received \$5 million and expects to receive another \$4.15 million by the end of September.

An 18-member State HAVA Planning Committee, appointed by Jaeger, developed the proposed plan, which is open for public comment until July 25. The state planning committee, with assistance from the Secretary of State's office and other county officials, has been working on the plan since May. At the conclusion of the public comment period, the state planning committee will reconvene to make final changes resulting from the public review and comment period before the plan is finalized by the Secretary of State's office and submitted to the Federal Election Assistance Commission and published in the Federal Register for 45 days.

For members of the public who plan to attend the public hearing and wish to first learn more about the proposed plan, it is available for review on the Secretary of State's HAVA web site at www.discovernd.com/hava. The plan may also be accessed at the Secretary of State's office, county and city auditors' offices, and public libraries. A copy of the proposed plan can be requested by e-mail, telephone, or by writing the Secretary of State's office. Copies of the plan were mailed to interested parties and voter groups, to include county and city election officials, the state's political parties, and interest groups represented on the state planning committee.

Comments on the proposed plan may be submitted online using the Secretary of State's HAVA web site at www.discovernd.com/hava or in writing to the Secretary of State's office.

According to Jaeger, the proposed plan addresses:

- Voting System Upgrades and Improvements - to include replacing punch card equipment in Williams County by June 2004 and upgrading the rest of the state by January 2006 with voting systems that allow voters to correct their ballots and allow persons with disabilities to vote unassisted
- Increased Voter Education - to better inform voters about voting procedures, voting systems, the election process, voting locations, and how to correct their ballots
- Voting Information - posting updated and easier to use voter instructions at polling locations and other election related sites
- State Based Grievance Procedure - establishment of a state based grievance procedure for voters to use when submitting complaints
- Election Official Training and Education - increased election official and poll worker education and training, to include increased efforts to recruit poll workers
- Central Voter Database - development and implementation of a Central Voter File, a centralized database of voters for purposes of preventing and detecting fraud and creating Election Day poll books
- Voting System Standards - adoption and development of voting system standards and a voting system test process to ensure voting systems used in the state are meeting minimum standards

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Attachments